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NEWS-LETTER

THE CHOICE BEFORE EUROPE
BY
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AS I WRITE, the chances that the Marshall offer will provide a new hope for a more united Europe look very slight. But I do not want to discuss the immediate issue, while the outcome is still uncertain. What I want to do here is to take up one or two of the issues underlying the challenge presented by Mr. Marshall to Europe—issues which will remain whatever the immediate results of his policy. If in doing so I return to a theme which I have already had the opportunity of stating in the News-Letter, I can only apologize and leave the reader to decide whether my repetitiveness springs from the genuine importance of the idea or my own inability to think of anything fresh.

THE AMERICAN OFFER TO EUROPE

The first point raised by the Marshall offer seems to me to lie in the extreme exhaustion of Europe. For two years now the nations of Europe—in which I include Great Britain—helped by loans from the United States and the direct relief provided by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Authority have been attempting to recover from the wounds of war. To-day the dollars available for carrying on this process are all but exhausted ; but Europe is on the whole no nearer recovery than it was in 1945 and in Germany decay and ruin are everywhere more terrible. The loss in material wealth is, it is true, partly due to the Allies' deliberate decision to deprive the greatest European industrial power—Germany—of its industry and the difference be-

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tween the figures for 1939 in coal and steel, and those of to-day is almost exactly accounted for by the fall in German production. But even without this extra disaster, it is clear that two major wars together with the rampant economic nationalism and protectionism of the inter-war years have profoundly weakened the European economy. Forty years ago, a hundred years ago, three hundred years ago, Europe was the most thriving and prosperous area on the face of the earth. To-day, it is ruined. It faces the stark problem of maintaining 350 million people at anything like a reasonable human standard. And it has been outstripped in power and in riches by other communities in the world.

This is the second vital factor brought out by the Marshall offer. The United States is powerful enough and rich enough to give it a margin of wealth sufficient to turn the scale between recovery and ruin in Europe. The land mass which two hundred years ago was a colonial territory of Europe and only sixty years ago depended upon European capital for a large part of its industrial development has now so outpaced its parent Europe that it can return, offering it virtually the means of life or death.

And in making its choice, Europe must demonstrate another aspect of its dependence. It is not altogether free to choose. A good half of Europe is more or less under the domination of another extra-European land mass—Soviet Russia—and even in Western Europe the influence of the Communist Party and its impact on the workers denies the Governments, particularly the French Government, complete freedom of action in replying to the American offer. Thus between American economic supremacy and Russian political influence, the old autonomy of Europe to-day looks weak, even illusory. Moreover, there are forces in Europe as well as in America and Russia which are pressing the Europeans to abandon whatever freedom of action they still retain and make their choice between the two mass states which stand beside them. " The battle is already engaged," they argue. " You must stand for the free society and America against totalitarianism and Russia : or alternatively

for a people's democracy and Russia against fascist capitalist exploitation and America. There is no neutrality in this fight. Take sides! Take sides! Europeans, Christians, liberals, scientists, workers, managers, declare yourselves! These are the Two Worlds and you must decide your allegiance now".

AMERICA OR RUSSIA—THE UNREAL CHOICE

Let us accept for a moment that this choice must be made and let us try to consider it as Christians. One must admit that a very strong weight of argument appears to lie on the side of America. Soviet Russia as a state is hostile to religion. Communism as a philosophy is based upon the denial of God. The spread of Russian power has reinforced the hold of authoritarian government in Eastern Europe. Even though the actors in the political drama have changed, the rôles are the same. The latest example of Hungary illustrates the difficulty which any non-Communist group experiences in maintaining its identity. But behind these obvious manifestations of political despotism and hostility to religion lies a deeper trouble, one which I should like to sum up in the admirable words of Christopher Dawson. (This quotation is taken from an article *Religious Liberty and the New Political Forces* published in *The Month*, in January, 1947, from which I shall quote freely in the following pages.) Dawson says:

> "The nightmares of the hive—the insect society—or Leviathan—the monstrous social organism—nightmares which have so long haunted the imagination of men of letters—seem to be passing from the sphere of phantasy to the world of everyday experience. Thanks to science, there is no longer any limit to the amount of power which the state can exercise. A technocratic system which operates through scientific planning, economic control and psychological conditioning is no longer a political absolutism of the traditional kind; it is a unitary mass organism in which the individual personality is absorbed and obliterated or transformed. The danger of such a system to religion is not so much the danger of persecution or open hostility: it is simply that it leaves no room for religion to exist."

I do not suggest that Russia has reached that hive-like state. Even less would the description be true of the still vigorously differentiated communities of Eastern Europe. But can one doubt that the trend of state and party policy is in that direction? And faced with this possible extinction of the truly human element in society, can anyone be in doubt where a Christian's choice in any future struggle should lie?

AMERICA AND THE MASS SOCIETY

But is it really so straightforward after all? It is true that in the United States, no organized governmental philosophy is at work to produce the "monolithic state". It is true that within the forty-eight states a most rich and most pleasing variety of types and organizations freely exist. The standard of living and with it the elbow room achieved by "free capitalism" is the greatest the world has ever seen and the United States has produced—in such institutions as the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton in the academic world or, in the sociological field, the whole regional development for which the Tennessee Valley Authority is responsible—experiments in personal relations and communal living of a very high order. Nor can one feel that the ferment is over. Anything may still happen in the United States—the best or the worst or, which is more likely, the best and the worst together. But in such an atmosphere, it is possible for the free spirit of man to develop unfettered and in the highest sphere of all, its relationship to God, to achieve a fully human life.

Yet when all this has been said, doubts must remain. The first difficulty is the nature of the economic forces upon which America's vast—but precarious—prosperity is built. These forces are completely amoral. The laws governing the business world in the United States are simply a modified jungle law. The business man who was asked at a Congressional enquiry to define profit, replied "Profit is what you can get". A far cry, this, from the medieval concept of the just price or even from the non-moral but rational concept of a price level that will not cause immediate in-

flation. One of my most vivid memories of a journey round the United States in April this year was a dinner at which many business leaders were present and where I pleaded that sufficient thought (I avoided the word planning) should be taken to prevent another slump and to keep America's production high and stable. One of the methods, I suggested, might be by a long-term policy of exporting capital goods to the rest of the world. The response was an hour's fierce attack upon "Communistic" government intervention in business. But at the end the most senior business man present—a man with a nation-wide reputation—said quietly, "Gentlemen, I have heard this talk ever since I was a boy. Every time anyone has proposed that the business world should accept some obligation to society, there have been business men ready to cry that 'the free way of life' was in danger. But I believe what you have heard this evening is your last chance of not committing suicide".

I quote this instance simply to illustrate the anti-social and amoral outlook of business. I do not mean the individual men are amoral or anti-social but simply that the system is. To accept it as it stands is really to accept a state of affairs in which one of the largest of human activities—economic life—is declared to be beyond the moral law.

Certain consequences of the system suggest that this basic amorality, this building of a whole society upon acquisitiveness, breeds its own evils, whatever the advantages (and they are great) in terms of the production of wealth. I cite only two—the enormous concentration of wealth in the hands of four or five corporations and banks—General Electric, General Motors, United States Steel, J. P. Morgan. Perhaps ten, perhaps twenty of these mammoth concerns control over 50 per cent of America's industrial capital. And with property so concentrated, the distribution of private property in a widespread and socially influential sense is all but impossible.

The second instance is partly a consequence of the first. America is not a society in which the worker—organized or not—can genuinely say he is a full and equal member of

the community. The dominant class is the business class. The dominant mood in this class is distrust and sometimes hatred of labour. That this Congress should have spent most of its time elaborating an anti-labour bill is significant. Management has contributed as much as Labour to soaring prices, shortages, dislocation, discontent. But it would be inconceivable for Congress to spend its time legislating against management. To this extent, Congress represents not the community, but a class in the community. To this extent it merits Marxist strictures on the class pattern underlying liberal democracy.

But, as in the case of Russia, the superficial drawbacks in government and social stricture are not perhaps the most serious. Again I quote Dawson's article :

> " . . . in the U.S.A. no less than in U.S.S.R. we are conscious of the victory of the mass over the individual. Moreover we see in America how material prosperity and technical efficiency produce social conformity, so that without any intervention on the part of the state, men of their own accord tend to think the same and look the same and behave in the same way. None of these things is peculiar to the United States. It is only that in America the standard of material prosperity is higher and the counter-balancing forces of authority and tradition are weaker. And consequently the United States has been the pioneer of a popular hedonistic mass civilization which is the chief alternative to the totalitarian ascetic mass civilization of Communism."

THE NATURE OF THE MODERN STATE

It seems to me, therefore, that before choices are made or decisions reached on what threatens to become mankind's most frightful war, this possibility should be considered. We in Europe are threatened not by a single materialist mass state, but are being squeezed into impotence between two mass states which differ in vital respects, but have an underlying resemblance. This resemblance is rooted in certain fundamental characteristics of the modern world which neither has escaped. They both suffer from giganticism.

They both show unquestioning confidence in the scientist and the technocrat. They both accept a materialist conception of civilization. They both tend—one consciously, the other unconsciously—to exclude from life the personal, the spiritual and the mystical elements without which man's hold even on his essential humanity seems to grow feeble.

As Dawson puts it :

> " Science has given modern man vast technical resources and undreamed possibilities of power. But science has not decided who shall use these gifts. They have been offered freely in the open market to the first comer and these chance comers were not concerned with spiritual ends, they were concerned entirely with the immediate exploitation of the new techniques for economic gain or political power.
>
> " The result has been that we have seen the ultimate control of human life pass out of the hands of the traditional representatives of the spiritual power into the hands of the technicians and the specialists who are themselves controlled either by the politicians and the men of business, or in the totalitarian countries by the party bosses and the secret police."

This diagnosis I accept and it explains the intense difficulty I feel in making a choice between the rival materialisms we are offered to-day. The hideous political tyranny of Russia with secret police and concentration camp appals me. But I recognize, possibly standing on its head but still there, a Christian truth in Communism's concern for the poor, the outcast and the exploited which explains its appeal to the young and to many mature and noble minds. (And I notice that not a Catholic society but a Communist army gave the land to the peasants in Hungary.) The freedom, the elbow room, the atmosphere of experiment in America appeals to me—but not the look on the face of a certain noted American when he said the United States needed a slump " to make Labour more docile ", nor the tedious emptiness of so much in American culture—radio, magazines, newspapers—nor the deep-rooted materialism which infects even religious bodies and tends to make Knights of St. Columbus almost indistinguishable from Rotarians or Elks.

And because of my deep intellectual and moral bewilderment on these points, I find it easy to believe that to a great extent Russia and America represent two aspects of deep modern trends and that the choice before Christians, before Europeans, indeed, before the world is much more profound and more challenging than simply picking sides in a material struggle. For do not the resemblances between America and Russia suggest that it is not this or that version of modern society but its very foundations that are at fault and that the swing from private collectivism to state collectivism, from practical hedonism to philosophical hedonism, from disorganized to organized technocracy (or vice versa) is to a very large extent irrelevant to the main problems of genuinely human living, of personal dignity and spiritual freedom which are the Christian's first concern? On all these points I would like to recommend Aldous Huxley's latest essay *Science, Liberty and Peace*.[1] It seems to me that Huxley has something disturbingly true to say of modern society—in Detroit or Magnetogorsk—when he writes:

> "Now it seems pretty obvious that man's psychological, to say nothing of his spiritual, needs cannot be fulfilled unless, first, he has a fair measure of personal independence and personal responsibility within and toward a self-governing group, unless, secondly, his work possesses a certain aesthetic value and human significance, and unless, in the third place, he is related to his natural environment in some organic, rooted, and symbiotic way. But in modern industrial societies vast numbers of men and women pass their whole lives in hideous cities, are wholly dependent for their livelihood upon a capitalistic or governmental boss, have to perform manual or clerical work that is repetitive, mechanical and intrinsically meaningless, are rootless, propertyless and entirely divorced from the world of nature. . . . *The reason for this dismal state of things is the progressive application of the results of pure science for the benefit of mass-producing and mass-distributing industry, and with the unconscious or conscious purpose of furthering centralization of power in finance, manufacture and government.*"

[1] Chatto and Windus, 3s. 6d. net. 1947.

The italics are mine, for it seems to me that Huxley is here pointing to something which is of vital importance to an understanding of the modern world. He explains its historical basis in these terms :

" . . . let us note that concentration of financial power preceded the scientific revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was largely responsible for making our industrial civilization the hateful thing it was and, for the most part, still is. Throughout Europe, land and natural resources were not owned outright by the people, represented by a multitude of small-holders ; nor were they the property of a sovereign, leasing to small tenants and spending the rent (which is the monetary expression of the social value of land) for social purposes . . . the best part of the land and its natural resources was the monopoly of a small class of landlords, who appropriated the social values of what should, quite obviously, have been everybody's property, to their own private use. Hence the early centralization of financial power—a power that was used to exploit the new technological discoveries for the benefit, not of individual small producers or co-operating groups, but for that of the class which alone possessed accumulations of money. Centralized finance begot centralized industry, and in due course the profits of centralized industry increased the power of centralized finance, so that it was able to proceed ever further in the direction of completely centralized production and distribution.

" The centralizing of industrial capacity in big mass-producing factories has resulted in the centralization of a large part of the population in cities and in the reduction of ever-increasing numbers of individuals to complete dependence upon a few private capitalists and their managers, or upon the one public capitalist, the state, represented by politicians and working through civil servants. So far as liberty is concerned, there is little to choose between the two types of boss."

THE REAL CHOICE

If one agrees with this analysis—which largely I do—then the outlook for the modern world is at once much worse and much better than those who urge us to take sides for or

against America or Russia would have us believe. The outlook is worse because we can find no way out of our present discontents simply by picking one or other version of mass society. But it is better in so far as this mass society has been produced by a series of historical decisions and can presumably be reversed, if its real evils are recognized and the reason and the creativeness of men set to work to change its direction and to begin working consciously against the cult of the huge, the centralization of irresponsible economic power, the acceptance of materialist standards and towards the decentralization of responsible political power, the creation of smaller co-operative (as opposed to collective) units, the development of industrial and scientific techniques to create and strengthen, rather than destroy, small communities. Aldous Huxley has various concrete suggestions to make on the methods of securing this reversal—the self-dedication of scientists to the new task, the creation of small co-operative undertakings to serve regional and local markets and the concentration of science on the primary task of all—the securing of sufficient food for humanity. Dawson also has wise words on the ways in which a solution might be sought. He warns us against one temptation—archaicism, the back-to-the-folk-weave approach, the Eric Gill attitude towards every form of machinery, the idolization of the feudal world (whose anti-social concentrations of wealth were partly responsible for our present leviathans).

Dawson says :

> "I do not believe that the obvious negative policy of opposition to the steadily increasing pressure of socialization or scientific collectivism by the assertion of the old principles of individualistic freedom is the right policy, for in this way Christians may be identifying themselves with a lost cause, and in some degree involving themselves in a defence of the vested interests in the past. What we have to do is to assert the principle of spiritual freedom on the highest level in the sphere of science and education and social planning. If it is possible to convince the coming generation of planners and teachers and scientific specialists that spiritual freedom is something

that must be preserved at all costs at every stage of social planning and under every system of scientific organization or collective control, then the introduction of a totalitarian order would be rendered difficult if not impossible."

EUROPE'S VOCATION

Obviously in a letter this length, I cannot either discuss the solutions outlined above, still less propose my own. But I do want to underline my own belief that the path before Christians to-day is not simply confined to the choice between two brands of materialism. They must use all their intelligence, all their courage and all their spiritual force to work for the more human and therefore more Christian order which centralization, mass organization, mass diffusion of ideas, uncritical scientificism and naive materialism all conspire to wipe out. And clearly in this struggle Europe is not simply a territory threatened with a double invasion. It remains the only society in the world in which the counter efforts towards sanity can be launched. Here in Europe is still the strongest remains of a more spiritual society and in the great religious orders, among the philosophers of the standing of Maritain and Gilson, in the new religious movements quickening the working classes, in the broad humanist tradition, in the genuine love of spiritual freedom felt by a whole generation of liberal thinkers, in the decency and tolerance of Western Europe, in the existence of labour movements religious in their origins and still profoundly humanist in their approach, in the cultural and national diversity of the Continent or, at another level, in such great experiments in social and economic efficiency as Danish farming or the Scandinavian co-operatives—in all these lie resources and reserves of power which the statesmen and leaders of Europe can mobilize in their search for a society which will rebuild itself not to the pattern of the mass but to the stature of free men.

Dawson suggests that we must begin with our scientists and our thinkers. Huxley talks of small groups organizing themselves to prove experimentally the possibilities of another type of social order. Clearly this is a challenge

which Christians in particular must prepare themselves to meet. This is not the first time that the Christian community has watched the ruin of a world grown old and cynical and overcentralized and materialistic. The world of the Caesars or the world of St. Augustine was riding as blind as ours. But none the less the Christian community was able to recreate that world by renewing its foundations. To-day the resources of rationalism and materialism, the power of states and the pride of governments appear greater, but it may be that already, as in the vision of Daniel, the Sentence of the Watchers has gone forth upon our modern leviathans and the foundations of a new society are ready to be laid. I do not say that either Europe or Christians are ready to co-operate in this great work. But I do say that this is where their true vocation lies.

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